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T. S. DENISON & COMPANY, Publishers, 154 W. Randolph St., Chicago

THE LADY OF THE LIBRARY

A COMEDY DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

BY

EDITH F. A. U. PAINTON

AUTHOR OF

*"As a Woman Thinketh," "A Burns Rebellion," "The Class Ship,"
"Clubbing a Husband," "The Graduate's Choice," "Hypno-
tizing a Hypnotist," "The Laughing Cure," "A
Prairie Rose," "Wanted: A Cook," "The
Winning Widow," "The Com-
mencement Manual," etc.*



CHICAGO

T. S. DENISON & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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1917

THE LADY OF THE LIBRARY

CHARACTERS.

JUDGE OLIVER WHITCOMB
.....The "Big Man" of Rushmore..(*Old Man Lead*)
BURR EDGEWORTH
.....A High School Student(*Juvenile Lead*)
REV. HARDING, a Young Preacher.....(*Character*)
THE POSTMAN(*Utility*)
SAMUEL SHADRACH SHERMAN, the Janitor...(*Comedian*)
MRS. EDGEWORTH, Burr's Mother, President of Library
Board(*Heavy*)
MISS CROMPTON, a High School Teacher.....(*Utility*)
MRS. CLARA NELSON, Mother of Ruth.....(*Utility*)
RUTH, the Postman's Bride.....(*Character*)
KATHERINE CARTER, the Village Poetess.....(*Character*)
SUSANNE, the Movie Actress.....(*Ingenue*)
ALMIRA HAZLEWOOD
.....The Librarian's Slim Sister.....(*Character*)
RACHEL HAZLEWOOD
.....The Librarian's Weighty Sister.....(*Character*)
PEARL REYNOLDS, the Assistant Librarian..(*Juvenile Lead*)
AVIS HAZLEWOOD, the Lady of the Library.....(*Lead*)

TIME—*The Present.*

PLACE—*Rushmore, a New England Village.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About Two Hours.*

SYNOPSIS.

ACT I. Reading Room of the Public Library. Friday Morning.
ACT. II. Same as Act I. Friday Evening.
ACT III. Same as Acts I and II. Saturday Evening.

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SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM.

ACT I. Morning at the Library. Sam's busy day. A movie actress in ordinary *role*. "Miss Avis won't be an old maid when she's a hundred." Burr warns Pearl against the fate of a spinster. The missing book. The Newly-Weds exchange "greetings" by the way. Avis expresses her love for the books. "The Lady of the Library." Mrs. Nelson recalls old times. The new preacher feels called to set to rights a few things. "Would you close the doors of knowledge to your four-footed brothers?" Mrs. Edgeworth exerts her authority. Burr declares himself and is met by a counter declaration. A startling insinuation. Avis unlocks the chambers of the past. "God be merciful to all who are born women!"

ACT II. Avis' guardians talk things over. "She's too young." Mrs. Edgeworth on the war-path. Sam assumes the blame. "I'm the guy that put the sin in Cincinnati." The Judge's return takes everybody by surprise. Susanne causes a ripple on the Newly-Weds' matrimonial sea. Mrs. Nelson expresses her mind. The preacher interviews Pearl and Susanne appeals for religious instruction. Mrs. Edgeworth's accusation is met by opposition on all sides. "If this was the Judgment Day and you were the Angel of Death itself, I could give no other answer!" "I would stake my very life on her honesty." The Judge's fruitless mission. Burr asserts himself, and Avis declares her sympathy. The Judge is repulsed. "Lights out, Judge!"

ACT III. Sam gets poetic through literary association. The preacher hears the story of Pearl's origin. Avis resigns her position. The Judge hears of the pearl ring and finds the long-sought child. Mrs. Edgeworth's change of heart. "Of course the dear child was not at all to blame." The Judge reveals the mystery of the lost volume and Burr contributes his share to the revelation. Pearl speaks her mind. "I have nothing whatever to say to Burr's mother." The Newly-Weds have adjusted their difficulties. Mrs. Edge-

worth rejoices. "I have always longed for a daughter." Susanne frightens the minister. "Go away, lady!" Avis receives and answers her letter at last. The Judge "considers their ages" and gets his "turn" at last. "Is it too late to find the minister?"

THE STORY.

Judge Whitcomb, the big man of Rushmore, a typical village of modern times, has been in love all his life with Avis Hazlewood, who, at the time of the play, has reached the age of sixty years. He has proposed to her regularly every ten years of their lives; but while she fully reciprocates his affection, she has allowed the claims of various duties to keep them apart.

Ten years before the play is set, the Judge has been called to his dying sister in France, and has written his proposal to Avis, slipping the letter into a book he had absent-mindedly carried from the library without its being "charged" to him, and sending the book to her by a small boy. The book was never delivered, and getting no answer to his letter, the Judge, finding his sister already dead and her child lost, does not return to his old home for ten years. On the day of his return the loss of the book is for the first time discovered, and Mrs. Edgeworth, president of the library board, wishing to find something tangible to bring between her son and the assistant librarian, with whom he is in love, accuses the girl of its theft. The situation is getting considerably strained when the Judge discovers by accident the identity of the little assistant, and finds in her the niece he has so long been seeking. At the same time he tells of the loss of the book, and of the letter which kept him from happiness for the last ten years, and both are recovered. Avis is carefully guarded by two elder sisters, whose maneuvers contribute to the amusement of the story. All of the villagers have some little part to play in the unraveling of the plot and in bringing together the two pairs of lovers.

NOTE.—The production of this play may be made much more realistic, the cast of characters lengthened at will to include any desirable number, and the comedy greatly strengthened, by introducing bits of pantomime at every pause, reproducing in detail the daily routine of life in a public library.

There is no limit to the types that may be introduced—the green country boy, who has never before seen a library and is greatly interested in every part of it; the small child who brings a note; the very old man who totters in with his cane; the group of school girls, whispering, giggling and chattering; the athletes from the game, yelling just outside the door, and every sort of individual touch may be added. The congested condition of the library at certain “rush” hours—a long line of “mixed” characters stretching from desk to door, waiting to return books, then passing in scattered lots to shelves to select books, looking them over, reading bits here and there, consulting together, then returning to join the second line which is having books “charged,” thus keeping both Avis and Pearl busy—one taking in and the other giving out—each one in both lines contributing some little comedy touch, might be introduced to excellent advantage.

One point must be emphasized. Every person is busy every moment he is on the stage, reading, writing, consulting dictionary or book shelves. Assign each his specific bit of “business” and plan the “picture” in every detail. Whenever Pearl is at the typewriter, throughout the play, she must be operating it, at all pauses in conversation, paying no attention to anything else. If but three keys are struck at one time, it adds its bit to the realistic effect.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS.

JUDGE WHITCOMB—Tall, dignified, noble looking, white-haired man, about sixty-five, elegantly but not ostentatiously dressed. A man of education and culture. Aristocratic in bearing and speech.

BURR—Ordinary student dress. About twenty. Bright, jolly, but capable of deep feeling.

REV. HARDING—Clerical suit of black. Awkward and ill at ease, but with an exaggerated sense of his own importance and duty.

POSTMAN—Uniform.

SAM—About thirty. Ordinary work clothes, neat but not showy.

MRS. EDGEWORTH—Elegantly dressed, very important and

overbearing. An effort to overshadow everybody is apparent. Rustling skirts, haughty air.

MISS CROMPTON—Neat, refined little woman, studious and thoughtful. Tailored suit, hat and gloves.

MRS. NELSON—Ordinary street suit for village.

RUTH—Bridal attire, either all white or lavishly trimmed in white. A small, doll-like girl.

KATHERINE—Refined, elegant bearing but not forward. Poetic. Dreamy.

SUSANNE—Very much “made up.” Dressed “to kill.” Much ribbons, fluffy wraps, jewelry, etc. Constantly fingering ribbons, chains, rings, etc. Coquettish and conceited. Very vain.

ALMIRA—Very slim and tall. Exaggerate this as much as possible. Dressed simply in outdoor attire. Sharp, thin, squeaky voice.

RACHEL—Very heavy. Dress in the same sort of clothes as Almira, that the contrast may be emphasized. Heavy bass voice.

PEARL—Very sweet, simple, lovable girl, sixteen. Modest and energetic. Dress to taste. Must be very attractive.

AVIS—One of the sweet old ladies whom everybody loves at sight. White hair, elegant in appearance, well cared for in every way. Energetic and light of motion, graceful and alert. Wears light gray in first two acts. Evening cloak, lined with white. Picture hat. In last act a violet gown, delicate of shade, with soft lace about throat and wrists.

PROPERTIES.

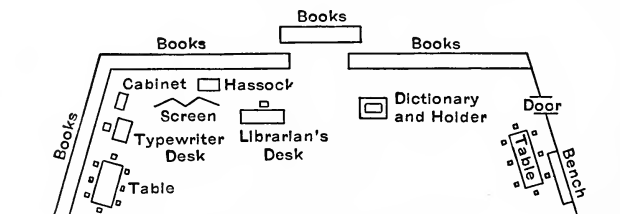
ACT I. Duster and coins for Sam. Books for Burr. Watch for Harding. Coat, hat and watch for Pearl. Bag of letters for Postman. Black gloves and purse (hand-bag) for Mrs. Nelson. Typewriter paper for Pearl. Books and magazines for the use of all throughout act.

ACT II. Special delivery letter and delivery book for Postman. Watch for Mrs. Edgeworth. Newspaper for

Judge. Coat for Susanne. Typewriter, paper, etc., for Pearl. Lace handkerchief for Judge. Books and magazines.

ACT III—Scraps of paper and waste-basket for Sam. Ring for Pearl. Book with letter for Burr, Judge and Avis. Books and magazines.

SCENE PLOT.



STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left; 1 *E.*, first entrance; *U. E.*, upper entrance; *R. 3 E.*, right entrance, up stage, etc.; *R. D.*, right door; *L. D.*, left door, etc.; *D. F.*, door in flat or back of the stage; up stage, away from the footlights, down stage, near footlights; 1 *G.*, first groove, etc. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

THE LADY OF THE LIBRARY

ACT I.

SCENE: *Reading room in a small country-town library. Books on shelves across back and right side of stage, with opening between at center back for passageway to back room, but with no door. This doorway should also be backed with books. At right of doorway, facing front, is the librarian's desk. At right, between center and rear of stage, stands the assistant's desk, with typewriter thereon. Down right is long reading table with six chairs arranged about its sides and one at rear end. Across from this along left side is another long reading table, similarly furnished with chairs, while behind it, along left wall, is a bench for readers' use. Both tables are well supplied with magazines. At rear, on left of center doorway, stands a dictionary in its holder, while on the right of the librarian's desk is a low seat, hassock, with screen in front. Between the typewriter desk and rear of stage stands a cabinet with card index. A telephone, vase of flowers and a small clock are on the librarian's desk. Pictures of authors grace any vacant spaces on the wall; rugs, etc., are used at taste of the producer. The only outside entrance is at L. 3 E. by door near rear. Lights on full throughout act.*

Bright music takes up the curtain. After brief pause.

Enter SAMUEL SHERMAN from C. with duster.

SAM. This is some world, all right, all right. Nothing to do but work. (*Dusts around carelessly for a little, whistling some lively air. Then whisks duster over backs of books at rear left and watches dust in amazement, jumping back as though startled and brushing clothes vigorously.*) Whew! Now, where did all that dust come from? 'Tain't been more'n six months since I dusted every one o' them books! People that read 'em must be mighty dirty folks. I'll tell

Miss Hazlewood to be careful who she lets handle 'em after this. (*Walks table L., writes on it with finger.*) "Samuel Shadrach Sherman"—that's me all right. Looks bigger'n I feel, though. (*Takes up magazine and turns pages.*) Humph! Not a tarnel thing in the magazines nowadays but how to get rich with nothing doing! Everybody wants to sell you the earth, with the sun and moon thrown in, for a buffalo nickel! Not for mine! (*Jingles coin in pockets.*) Ain't got no pockets to be picked.

Enter SUSANNE, L.

SUSANNE. Good morning. Are you the librarian? (SAM jumps, dusts table hastily and turns, proudly pulling himself up to full height.)

SAM. Me? No, madam, I am the proprietor!

SUSANNE. What? Mr. Carnegie?

SAM. Well, no; not quite. I meant to say the proprietor of the—(*pauses, waving duster loftily*) you know—dust-rag, mop-stick, fireworks—and all that sort of thing.

SUSANNE. In other words—

SAM. Mr. Samuel Shadrach Sherman—the cleaner-in-chief, madam, at your service.

SUSANNE. I see. Exit man-of-all-money; enter man-of-all-work. Lights low—slow, sad music. And the librarian?

SAM. You are a little early, madam. The library doesn't open to the public until 8 o'clock. Miss Hazlewood doesn't usually get down for an hour after that nowadays; but Miss Reynolds—she's the assister—is sure to be on time.

SUSANNE. I see. Oh, well, I've got more time than anything else these days. I should worry! (*Turns to book-cases, rear left.*) No objections to my looking at the books, I presume.

SAM. Look ahead, madam. Seeing's free. (*She looks at books while he walks around, sising her up from every side, nodding his approval behind her back.*) Stranger in Rushmore, ain't you?

SUSANNE (*without turning*). Somewhat. (*Pause.*) I'm an actress.

SAM. Gee!

SUSANNE (*over her shoulder*). In the movies, you know.

SAM. Whew!

SUSANNE. Looking up costumes, you see—something swell and startling—and—and—striking, and all that. (*Whirls before him, primping and posing to show off dress.*) Get the effect?

SAM (*with great admiration*). You bet! (*She bows and smiles coquettishly.*) May I—be so bold—as to ask your name, madam?

SUSANNE (*turning again to books*). Asking's easy, sir. Telling isn't.

SAM. Oh, if you don't want—

SUSANNE (*turning to him*). That's not it. You see, I don't exactly know. At present my name is Mrs. Miller in this State. In Oregon it's Miss Whitney, my maiden name, and in Washington and California it is Mrs. Deane, my first husband's name. So—better compromise and just say "Susanne." I never change that. (*Returns to examination of books.*)

SAM. Susanne! Gee! That's swell! Susanne—Sam—Sam—Susanne! Some class, eh? You don't live in Rushmore, then?

SUSANNE (*turning to him*). Well, I eat and sleep here now, but I have a trunk in Reno, Nevada, where I am getting a divorce from my present husband—

SAM (*disappointed*). Then you're married now?

SUSANNE. Well, I'm married in Texas, New York and Massachusetts; divorced in South Dakota, Missouri, Alaska, Oklahoma and California; a bigamist in three other states and a single woman in eight others.

SAM. Gee! Some syndicate!

SUSANNE. Yes, rather a dangerous proposition. But (*coquettishly*) at present I am disengaged. (*He walks to dust desk, she walks down to table L. and sits on left side,*

opens magazine listlessly.) What about the librarian here? Who and what is she?

SAM (*coming down*). One of the angels of earth, madam. A dear old lady—

SUSANNE. Old?

SAM. Yes—sixty, at least. It's a long story. You see, there's the Misses Hazlewood—

SUSANNE. *Mrs.?* Oh! A widow!

SAM. No, *not* Mrs.—just miss—three misses—Almira, Rachel and Avis, the Lady of the Library.

SUSANNE. Old maid, eh?

SAM. Not on your life! Just an unmarried lady, if you please—alive and in love with life to her finger-tips. Her two older sisters who take care of her, and are sort o' bringing her up right, you know, may be old maids, if you like, but Miss Avis won't be when she's a hundred! She's the loveliest lady in this town and she gets younger and prettier every year.

SUSANNE. How wonderful!

SAM. Oh, it's amusing to strangers, but we Rushmore folks are used to it. She's been in the library thirty years now and had a big influence on the life of the town. But those old maids—one as big as a barrel, the other as thin as a beanpole—watch over every move she makes like as if she was only sixteen. But they can't be made to see that she's grown up.

SUSANNE. Does she do all the work here?

SAM. No, there's an assister—Pearl Reynolds—and she's a mystery.

SUSANNE. How's that? I love mysteries. Just the thing for the movies.

SAM. A waif. A nurse was bringing her to America—dies on shipboard. Nobody knows where she's from nor who she is. She lives with Mrs. Carter—our poetess, if you please, madam—who brought her up. She calls her Aunt Katherine—Miss Reynolds calls Mrs. Carter, I mean—but she ain't no sort o' real kin. Here she comes now. (*Rises and busies himself dusting.*)

SUSANNE. Quick music! Lights up! Enter fair, mysterious stranger. (*Reads.*)

Enter PEARL REYNOLDS *and* BURR EDGEWORTH, *L.*

SAM. Morning, Miss Reynolds.

PEARL *and* BURR. Good morning, Sam. (*BURR goes to desk, depositing an armful of books. PEARL goes to C. doorway, then turns, sees SUSANNE and consults watch.*)

PEARL. Am I late? (*Exits C. with coat and hat.*)

SAM. Oh, no. This lady was early. "The early bird catches the worm."

BURR. Poor worm! I want to consult the dictionary. (*Opens dictionary.*)

SAM. No extra charge. Help yourself. (*Works at table R., watching SUSANNE.*)

PEARL *re-enters C. without wraps.*

PEARL. I suppose the Hazlewood ladies thought it was too cold and damp for Miss Avis to venture out so early this morning.

BURR (*looking up from dictionary*). Aren't they a pair of freaks?

PEARL (*sitting at desk*). Why, Burr!

BURR. Well, they are. If Miss Rachel wasn't so fat—

PEARL. And Miss Almira wasn't so flat. (*Both laugh.*)

BURR (*walks to front of desk and leans on it, face half to audience*). You must make up your mind to an early marriage, Pearl, and avoid such a fate as—

PEARL (*hastily searching drawer of desk to hide face*). I'd never mind being an old maid, if I could just be half as sweet and lovely as Miss Avis.

BURR. She's a saint. But none too happy.

PEARL. What makes you think so?

BURR. Why, you know her story, don't you? (*PEARL shakes head.*) You don't? Why, she and Judge Whitcomb have been lovers all their lives, but something or other—nobody but themselves knows what—has kept them apart. Now he's over in Europe—she's here—and both living lives

of single sadness, each pining for the other, but neither willing to admit it.

PEARL. Poor Miss Avis! Ought you to tell it?

BURR. Oh, it's no secret. Everybody knows it. The two dragons—that's my pet name for the stern sisters of our white-haired Cinderella—are determined to keep them separated to the end—and it looks as if they would.

PEARL. How long has the Judge been in Europe? He's the big man of Rushmore, isn't he?

BURR. Sure. Chief Mogul! Millionaire, you know—and all that. Been gone ten years.

PEARL. Ten years? Since before I came here.

BURR. Yes, think of it. I was only ten when he left. He went to see his sister who was married to a Frenchman, and—oh, Pearl, it's dreadful when two real lovers part like that. You and I just mustn't—

SUSANNE (*going to desk*). Pardon me, but can you tell me where to find a book describing the costumes of the Renaissance period?

PEARL (*rising and going to books R.*). Certainly. Right over her. From 821 to 830.

SUSANNE (*following*). Thank you. Do you think—(*throws appealing glance to BURR over shoulder, who is watching her admiringly*). I'm not much used to libraries. Could it—

BURR (*following*). May I—er—help you?

SUSANNE (*gratefully*). So kind of you. (*Throws a triumphant glance at PEARL, who resumes seat at desk, looking over cards, checking books, etc. SAM eyes their interest with disgust.*)

SAM. Well, I'll be chewed! (*Exits C. with duster, watching BURR and SUSANNE until off stage.*)

Enter MISS CROMPTON, L.

PEARL. Good morning, Miss Crompton.

MISS C. Good morning. I am returning this book, Miss Reynolds. (*SAM sticks head in at C. to see who entered.*) "Plutarch's Lives." (*PEARL takes book, checks it, checks*

loaning card, etc., puts book to one side and returns card to MISS C.)

SAM. Gee! Wonder how many lives that guy had. (*Withdraws C.*)

MISS C. I wonder if there is a copy of "The Philosophy of Epictetus" in the library.

PEARL (*rising and going out C.*). I'll see—"The Philosophy of Epictetus."

MISS C. It's very rare, but I wish to consult it, if a copy can be found. My students are deeply interested. (*Looks at books R., sees BURR, eyes SUSANNE with disapproval.*) Why, Burr Edgeworth, you here?

BURR (*embarrassed*). Er—yes, Miss Crompton, I was on my way to school and—and—stopped to consult the dictionary.

MISS C. (*sarcastically*). We have several dictionaries at the schoolhouse and—what dictionaries are those in that part of the room?

BURR. Why—er—I know—but—

MISS C. And your class calls at nine promptly.

BURR (*walking to her*). Yes, and I'll go right over with you, if I may.

SUSANNE. Sudden trumpet call. Alarm from without. Exit leading gent.

PEARL (*re-entering C.*). I do not seem to be able to find the book, Miss Crompton. Did you wish to use it this morning? (*SUSANNE sits table R., facing center.*)

MISS C. Oh, not especially. Any time today. We are making a systematic study of ancient philosophies and I consider it incomplete without some knowledge of Epictetus.

Enter KATHERINE CARTER, L. Walks to desk. All bow.

PEARL. I'll ask Miss Hazlewood. She will know.

MISS C. Yes, indeed. What would we ever do without that wonderful woman in this town? She is well named the Lady of the Library. Every day I thank her for the influence she exerts over the reading of our students—

directing their lines of thought, suggesting, in that sweet, subtle way of hers, the best paths, sowing the seeds of cultured taste in classic lore, how much our whole community owes its Lady of the Library for the refining force she is—the whole blessed personality of her!

KATHERINE. I often think she's like a sweet and delicate flower and doesn't guess the value of her fragrant breath. Though this room is alive with the thought of her, yet it seems like a deserted house, with the shades down and the fires out, until she comes in.

BURR. Like home when mother's away.

MISS C. That's it. It's the thought atmosphere she carries with her, the soul of her shining out—there I go again! (*Laughs.*) My students tell me I fairly rave whenever Miss Hazlewood is mentioned; but she little guesses how much we appreciate her. I cite her as my model of womanhood for all my girls, my model of wifehood for all my boys. (*Turns to go.*)

PEARL. I'll tell her about the book, then Miss Crompton.

MISS C. Thank you. Come, Burr. (*Exeunt Miss C. and BURR, L.*)

KATHERINE. Have you a rhyming dictionary, Pearl?

PEARL. I think so. (*Rising, searches shelves behind desk.*) Yes, Aunt Katherine. Here is one. (*Hands book.*)

KATHERINE (*rapidly turning pages*). I am so anxious to get this poem completed before the *Enterprise* goes to press this week. It is really Chaucerian in tone; but somehow, I can't find the proper rhymes, and the meter won't measure correctly, and I'm having such a time. Verily, the life of a poetess is hard.

PEARL. I hope this will help you out of all your troubles, Aunt Katherine.

SUSANNE (*coming to desk*). Have you "She"? (*PEARL goes to shelf at R.*)

KATHERINE. Dear me! What grammar. You should ask if "She" is in the library.

SUSANNE. Dear me! What a superfluity! I might find too many "shes" if I tried that stunt. (*To PEARL, who*

hands her book.) Thank you. (*Returns to seat at table R., while KATHERINE goes to table L., sits and writes.*)

Enter POSTMAN, L., with bag of letters.

POSTMAN. Letters! Letters! Mail—and female.

PEARL (*laughing as he unloads them*). Thank you.

POSTMAN (*thoughtfully as he shifts letters through his fingers, reading the postmarks and addresses*). I've brought Miss Avis the mail for a good many years now. It would do me as much good as it would her—almost—if I could see one come in again in the old familiar handwriting that used to come so much. But—they don't seem to turn up. I guess that's all this morning, Miss Reynolds. (*Starts to leave as—*)

Enter RUTH, L.

RUTH. Oh, here you are, lovie.

POSTMAN. Bless the birdie! (*They embrace.*)

RUTH. I just thought I'd find my precious honey-boy somewhere around here. It's just been a whole year—so it has—since he left his wife all aloney. Poor dear old manie. Him does have to work so hard to keep his little wife!

POSTMAN. And poor little wife has to stay all aloney. And her just has to hunt up her boy, doesn't her? Bless her dear little heart! (*Exeunt POSTMAN and RUTH, arms around each other, L.*)

SUSANNE. Soft tinkle of bells. Enter Newly-Weds! Deliver me! They remind me of "Babes in the Wood."

KATHERINE. Pardon me. Perhaps you mean "Infantile Innocents in the Recesses of the Forest."

SUSANNE. Well, I didn't—but—have it your way. It's all the same in Dutch. Wouldn't it be great sport to strike up a flirtation with Mr. Lovey-Dovey?

PEARL (*shocked*). Impossible!

SUSANNE. Think so? Wait and see. Men are all alike—when you get acquainted with them.

Enter AVIS and RACHEL, L.

AVIS. Am I very late, Pearl?

PEARL (*rising*). Oh, no, Miss Avis. There has been very little to do so far this morning. Let me take your wraps. (*AVIS removes coat and hat, gloves, etc., and hands them to PEARL, who carries them out C.*) The mail just came.

AVIS. The mail? (*Sorts letters eagerly, reading address, postmark, etc.*)

RACHEL (*walks to table L., talks to KATHERINE*). It was too damp this morning for a girl like Avis to risk being out. Almira and I made her wait until the sun was up. We can't be too careful of these young people, Mrs. Carter.

KATHERINE. Of course not. But Miss Avis seems—

RACHEL. Oh, she's as strong as most girls, I reckon, but we can't run any risk. Are you sure it's warm enough here, Avis?

AVIS. Plenty, thank you, Rachel. (*Still reading letters.*)

Enter SAM, C., followed by PEARL. PEARL sits typewriter.

RACHEL. Hadn't you better keep on your coat and hat?

AVIS (*sits desk, opening letters*). Oh, no; it's very comfortable, I'm sure.

RACHEL (*sniffing the air*). I don't know. If you should catch cold—

SAM. I'm sure it's nice and warm, Miss Hazlewood.

RACHEL. Nobody asked you to be sure about anything, Sam Sherman. Speak when you're spoken to.

SAM (*meekly*). Yes'm.

SUSANNE (*walking to desk to return book*). But it's really very warm here—

RACHEL. And who may you be, tricked out like a wax doll on the Christmas tree? If it's so *very* warm, as you say, look out that you don't melt and all your coloring run to waste. Good-bye, Avis. Don't have too much air in the room, and keep out of draughts.

AVIS (*looking up from letters*). I will, Rachel. Good-bye.

SUSANNE (*standing where RACHEL stopped her before*). But—

(RACHEL *squelches her with a long look*. SUSANNE *drops head and returns to table*. RACHEL *turns to go*. Meets SAM.)

SAM. And—

(RACHEL *motions him out of her way with a look of disdain*. He *wilts*. RACHEL *exits L.*)

AVIS (*after a pause*). Were these all the letters, Pearl?

PEARL. Yes.

(AVIS *sighs, rises, goes to PEARL and hands her a bunch of them.*)

AVIS. You may answer these. I will have to dictate answers to a few later in the day. (*Turns to shelves and touches books gently, pushing one here and pulling one there, readjusting all with loving touch.*) The dear books! How glad I am to bid them all "Good morning" again, Pearl. What a silly old thing I am to miss them so much over night. But I do. Often I wake at night and think of them here all alone and wonder if they're cold and lonely and wakeful as I am. They seem so like real, living friends, that I'm actually lonely for the touch of them when I go away.

PEARL. And I believe they miss you, too, Miss Avis.

AVIS (*eagerly turning to her*). Oh, do you think so? Do you really?

PEARL. I certainly do. Do not the authors put their very *souls* into books? And don't the souls live on and on and on?

AVIS (*behind PEARL's chair, leaning on it*). I didn't know that anybody but myself had such a curious fancy, Pearl; but often, when I read a book I feel that the spirit of the writer comes very, very close, helping me to understand his inmost thoughts as I read the printed page. Especially is this true of Whitman, where he says:

When you read these . . . realizing my poems,
 seeking me,
Be it as if I were with you. Be not too certain but
 I am now with you.

PEARL. The books *do* know you. They begin to beam and smile and glow—really look alive when you come in. Did you never read Aunt Katherine's poem about it?

AVIS. No.

PEARL. I suppose she didn't dare show it to you. It's lovely. I only remember a part of it, but the bit I like best runs something like this:

Not hers the glow that breeds desire
For storms of controversial war!
The light of the diviner fire
Reveals to her all life is for:
Not hers the conflict or the strife
That weaker, smaller natures see;
Hers to inspire the inner life—
True Lady of the Library!

Among the books her glowing face
Secures the setting it requires;
Among the master-minds her place
Is fixed, to kindle smouldering fires;
The very books there know her touch,
And wake to life for such as she;
At night-time, missing overmuch
Their Lady of the Library.

AVIS (*deeply touched*). It is beautiful, far too beautiful for me. (*Turns to shelves again.*)

PEARL. That reminds me. Miss Crompton asked for "The Philosophy of Epictetus" this morning, and I couldn't find it. I see there is a volume of it in the catalogue—No. 633—but it isn't on the shelf, nor has it been checked out. I can't seem to recall ever having seen it. Maybe it was hiding from me—just waiting for you.

AVIS. We had a copy, I know. (*Consults card index while PEARL typewrites. As she speaks PEARL stops.*) I remember it. It was on the top shelf back in the reference room with the books so seldom called for. I haven't seen it for years. I'll look. (*Exits C. Calls out C.*) Sam, bring the step-ladder, please. (*PEARL typewrites. Pause.*)

Enter CLARA NELSON, L. Walks to desk.

PEARL (*leaves typewriter, goes to library desk to meet her*). Good morning, Mrs. Nelson.

CLARA. Good morning. (*Looks all around, speaks mysteriously.*) Has the postman been here yet, Miss Reynolds?

PEARL. Yes. Some time ago.

CLARA. And was Ruth—his wife—my daughter—with him?

PEARL. Yes. She met him here.

CLARA. Silly girl! She can't endure him out of her sight. That's what it means to be young and trusting, I suppose.

AVIS (*re-entering C.*). The book isn't here, Pearl. We'll have to institute a search. Good morning, Clara. (*PEARL returns to typewriter. Writes in all the pauses. AVIS sits, CLARA leaning over desk to talk to her.*)

CLARA. Good morning, Avis. I declare you're looking younger than ever. How do you manage it?

AVIS. Just living—and loving to live, I guess.

CLARA. I was just talking to Miss Reynolds about that silly girl of mine—she follows Harold everywhere he goes—mail bag and all.

AVIS (*smiling*). It does me good to see them so happy.

CLARA. Yes, if it will only last. (*Sighs.*)

AVIS. Oh, it must!

CLARA. Maybe so, maybe so; but one can never tell. I used to think that you and Judge Whitcomb would make just such a couple, Avis. I often wonder yet how you ever had the heart to send him away and ruin both your lives.

AVIS. Hush! (*Looks all around, startled.*)

CLARA. Oh, you always say "hush," and I nearly always say "hush," too, for I know it's none of my business; but if ever a man worshipped the ground a woman walked on, that man was Judge Oliver Whitcomb, and that woman was you. Weren't you and I girls at school together, and haven't I seen him your lover for fully fifty years?

AVIS (*pained*). Don't, Clara; please don't.

CLARA. But it isn't right, Avis. It isn't right. How could you treat him so?

AVIS. There was Rachel and Almira—

CLARA. H'm! And did he want Rachel and Almira? And did they want him?

AVIS. Neither. That was partly the trouble. But don't talk about it, Clara. He found out after while that he didn't want me.

CLARA. A likely story. It's time somebody talked about it. And you growing lovelier and sweeter every blessed day.

AVIS. I always have happy thoughts, Clara, even if I have to feed them upon sweet memories and blissful dreams of might-have-been joys. When the sun shines, the flowers open to the light, and the birds carol their praises to the Giver of Life, there's the voice of heaven in the heart that no tears can drown.

Enter REV. HARDING, L., watch in hand.

HARDING. Have you—pardon me, I see your clock is one minute fast. Permit me to correct it. It's a sin to try to deceive Father Time. (*Sets clock.*) We must always be perfectly honest with every hour. Good morning, Mrs. Nelson.

CLARA. Good morning.

HARDING. Would you mind taking off those black gloves? They give me the horrors. Nobody has a right to deprive their hands of sunlight and air by those hideous shrouds. Let your hands breathe, woman. Give them sun baths—the breath and fire of heaven. (*She snatches off gloves and puts in purse.*) Now, Miss Hazlewood, have you—oh, the pretty flowers! May I please give them a fresh drink? They look so thirsty. (*CLARA holds up hands in despair and hurries out L.*)

AVIS. But I'm sure that Sam—

HARDING. See; the vase is not nearly full. Poor blossoms! Is the faucet out here? (*Points C.*)

AVIS. Yes. (*He exits C. with vase of flowers.*)

SUSANNE. Rag-time music. Enter freak dancer. Masquerade effect. Lights red.

AVIS (*looking nervously at books*). I do wish I could find that volume of Epictetus. I never lost track of a book before in all the thirty years I've been in charge here.

PEARL (*looking up from work*). It will turn up, Miss Avis.

HARDING (*re-entering C. with vase of flowers*). There, that's better. See how much happier they look. It's a sin to deprive any living thing of its God-given food and drink, Miss Hazlewood. That reminds me—have you a basin?

AVIS. A basin? No.

HARDING. Too bad.

AVIS. Why?

HARDING. There should be a basin of water set somewhere here for the thirsty dogs.

AVIS. But dogs are never permitted in the library.

HARDING. Not permitted? Oh, how cruel! Would you deprive one of God's creatures of the privilege of educational pursuits? Close the doors of knowledge to your four-footed brothers? For shame, Miss Hazlewood! For shame!

AVIS. But I—I—it's not my—(HARDING crosses to KATHERINE.)

PEARL. Don't you care, Miss Avis. He doesn't mean you.

HARDING (*to KATHERINE*). I see you are employing the early morning hours in the pursuit of the higher wisdom, Mrs. Carter.

KATHERINE. Yes, I'm looking for a rhyme to "funeral." Can you suggest one?

HARDING. Rhyme? Oh, no, no. Life is too serious to be frittered away in such frivolous pastimes, Mrs. Carter. I am amazed that you should suggest—

SUSANNE (*rising and speaking across to him*). Pardon me, sir, but are you a minister? A preacher? (*Assumes great awe and reverence.*)

HARDING (*turns and crosses to her*). I am so honored, madam.

SUSANNE (*with assumed penitential air*). I am a very wicked woman, I'm afraid, sir. I—I—I am an actress. (*Looks appealingly at him.*)

HARDING (*shrinking back*). An actress?

SUSANNE (*bowing*). In the movies.

HARDING. Ah! (*Aside.*) So fair and yet so frail!

SUSANNE (*trembling voice, lays hand on his sleeve*). Don't you think there's any hope for me?

HARDING. I fear—ah—(*gazes at her, she holds his eye*) er—do you repent?

SUSANNE. I'm not sure. What does it mean to repent?

HARDING. I will tell you, poor soul. (*They sit side by side at right side of table, at right, and converse in dumb show.*)

Enter MRS. EDGEWORTH, L.

MRS. E. Good morning, Miss Hazlewood.

AVIS. Good morning. What can I do for you, Mrs. Edgeworth?

MRS. E. (*at desk*). A volume of Browning, if you please. I am to arrange the program for our Browning Club, you know, and haven't yet had time to begin work upon it. (*AVIS searches shelves, but MRS. E. turns to PEARL significantly.*) I don't suppose Burr has been in this morning.

AVIS (*over shoulder*). I haven't seen him, Mrs. Edgeworth.

PEARL. He was in this morning on his way to school, Mrs. Edgeworth.

MRS. E. (*sharply*). What for?

PEARL. Why, to—to—to consult the dictionary.

MRS. E. Humph!

AVIS (*turning from shelf with book*). Here's a complete Browning, Mrs. Edgeworth.

MRS. E. Thank you. (*Turns to look for seat.*)

AVIS. By the way, we have lost or mislaid a copy of "The Philosophy of Epictetus." Have you any idea how or where?

MRS. E. No. It was a very rare volume, I believe.

AVIS. Yes. Dated 1604.

MRS. E. And as long as I've been President of the Library Board, no volume, valuable or otherwise, has been reported missing before. (*Looks pointedly at PEARL. PEARL looks startled.*)

AVIS. I know.

MRS. E. Strange. (*Still gazing at PEARL significantly. PEARL drops head. MRS. E. smiles in satisfaction.*)

AVIS. Can I help you any further?

MRS. E. I think not, thank you. I'll sit here, if I may, and arrange my work. (*Goes to seat behind screen.*)

AVIS. Certainly. (*Resumes work — PEARL her type-writing.*)

SUSANNE (*looking up gratefully at HARDING*). Oh, I am so grateful to you, sir. And you really think—(*rising*)

HARDING (*helping her adjust coat*). I know. If you will come with me. (*She takes his arm and they exeunt L.*)

Enter SAM, C., just in time to watch the play.

SAM. Well—I *will* be chewed!—teetotally chewed up!

KATHERINE (*rising to leave*). Trust a girl of that kind to deceive "the very elect." (*Exits L.*)

After a pause, enter BURR, L.

BURR. Miss Crompton wants to know if the volume of Epictetus has been found.

AVIS. No, Burr. We have no idea where it has disappeared. It has not been called for before in ten years.

BURR. I declare, you're as sweet as a peach today, Miss Hazlewood—with that rose on your cheek and that dream in your eyes!

AVIS. What a foolish little boy you are, Burr.

BURR. But I mean it; honest, I do. Don't you know 't isn't fair to the other girls for you to bathe in this magic bloom of eternal youth? I've fought three different fellows for your favor already—and yet you won't promise to wait for me.

'Twas ever thus; from childhood's hour
I've found my fondest hopes decay;

I never loved a human flower
But she was sure to murmur "Nay!"

AVIS. Such delightful nonsense, Burr.

BURR. Well, Library Lady—cruel, cruel lady that you are—if you find that book—

AVIS. Wait. Let me take a look through the books in need of binding. It may be there. (*Exits C., followed by SAM.*)

BURR (*hastily turning to PEARL*). All alone for one glorious minute—really, Pearl? Come over here. (*Takes her hands and pulls her from the desk.*) It seems I never get a chance for a word with you. How long do you think a fellow's going to stand it? You'll let me go home with you, won't you? (*Leads her down front.*)

PEARL. Oh, hush, Burr, hush!

BURR. Yes, it's always "hush, Burr, hush!" when you know I've just got to get it out. Haven't I been fairly crazy about you ever since the very first moment I saw you? And doesn't everybody in town know it? Why must I hush?

MRS. E. (*coming from behind screen and walking down to step between them*). Because I forbid your saying another word to this girl—that's why!

BURR. Mother!

MRS. E. You know that this nameless girl is no fit match for an Edgeworth. You know that I have forbidden your association with the children of the common herd—especially this outcast creature whom nobody knows anything about. You know—

BURR. What do I care where she came from, mother, or who were her parents? I do not love her for anything of that sort. I love her because she is her own dear, lovely, noble self—and—because I can't help it. I know—

PEARL. Oh, Burr, hush!

MRS. E. Yes, hush! Speaking of nobility, you also know, my son, that a very rare and valuable book has been—er—we'll say *lost*—from the library since this "noble" girl came to assist with the work here. You know, as well

as I know, that nothing of the kind has ever happened before in this town.

Enter AVIS, C.

PEARL (*horrified*). Oh, Mrs. Edgeworth!

BURR. But, mother—

MRS. E. (*holding up her hand to enjoin silence*). Mind, I don't *say* she took the book, but I do say it looks most suspicious—and we shall take an inventory at once, beginning this very evening. Unless the book is found, she will be called to account for it. Now, my son—come home.

BURR (*tries to take PEARL in his arms, MRS. E. pulls him away*). Pearl, I—(PEARL *turns away, sobbing*. MRS. E. *drags BURR out L., he looking back.*)

AVIS (*walking down to PEARL*). I am so sorry, Pearl. Mrs. Edgeworth does not, cannot, realize how harsh her words sound.

PEARL. Oh, Miss Avis, you mustn't think—

AVIS (*taking PEARL in her arms*). Bless your heart, dear, don't I *know* how unjust the very thought is? And don't I also know how heavy your heart must be? Years ago, Pearl—oh, many, many years ago—I, too, had a lover, as young and ardent as Burr.

PEARL. I know. Judge Whitcomb.

AVIS. Years ago I was separated from him by the whims and prejudices of others and what I was then made to consider my duty. A big word is duty, dear, when spelled with the capital D. I am only a silly old woman now, but—I've never learned not to care—never found the way to forget. I never shall. I only tell you this sacred tale of my heart's life that you may be sure, whatever happens, that I am not yet too old to understand.

PEARL (*sobbing on her shoulder*). Oh, Miss Avis! Miss Avis! You are so good to me! I—I—I am so miserable! I think my heart is broken!

AVIS. As I thought of mine in the far-off days, dear. God be merciful to all who are born women!

Enter BURR, L.

BURR (*at door L.*). Pearl! (PEARL *turns and starts back.* AVIS *clasps hands, looks up.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

Same scene as Act I. Time, evening of the same day. Lights low. ALMIRA and RACHEL HAZLEWOOD are discovered, ALMIRA in chair at right of left-side table and RACHEL in chair at left of right-side table. They have turned the chairs to face each other.

RACHEL. Well, Almira, I don't see as we can do anything more by hanging around here. We've brought the child here, safe and sound, and free from insult, once more, and I s'pose we may as well go home now till time to come and take her home.

ALMIRA. I see where you're right, Rachel. It's quite a task having a girl like her to look after. But—

RACHEL. If anything should happen to her we'd never forgive ourselves. And it's never safe for girls of her age—especially with such pretty girls as our Avis, if I do say it, as I shouldn't—to be out alone, even in the daytime, let alone evening.

ALMIRA. Just as I always say, Rachel. And we promised poor, dear mother that we'd take care of her always.

RACHEL. We must do our best.

ALMIRA. Avis is a good girl, and all that, but I sometimes think she has a sort of hankering after that Whitcomb fellow yet. She's too young for that sort of thing, but—

RACHEL. You never can tell. Even the best of 'em make lots of work and worry when you're bringing 'em up. And I just feel it in my bones that something's going to happen.

ALMIRA. In your bones? Humph! Don't see how you hear 'em. Now, if it was my bones—

Enter AVIS, C.

AVIS. Are you still here, girls?

ALMIRA (*rising*). Yes, but we're going now. You aren't alone here, are you, Avis? (*RACHEL rises and replaces both chairs at tables.*)

AVIS. Oh, no, Almira. Pearl is here, and Sam, too. We are searching for that book, you know, through all the back shelves.

RACHEL. Well, then, if you're sure you're all right—

AVIS. Of course, Rachel.

RACHEL. You always say that, Avis, but if you knew as much about the wickedness of this world as Almira and I do, you'd understand why we are so uneasy about you, and what we are trying to the best of our ability and understanding to guard you against.

AVIS. I am sure, Rachel—

ALMIRA. Now, don't you waste any more words with men folks, and be sure you keep the door locked out of library hours. A girl can't be too careful, you know.

RACHEL. And for heaven's sakes, don't give people any chance to gossip about you. You must think of your reputation.

AVIS. I will, girls. I'll remember. Good-bye.

ALMIRA. We'll call for you at 10.

AVIS. Make it 10:30 tonight, girls. We'll be very busy and must work late. Good-bye. (*Watches them off with amused smile.*) Dear girls! If they only would begin to realize that I've grown up!

Enter PEARL, C. Enter MRS. EDGEWORTH, L.

AVIS. Did you find it, Pearl?

PEARL. No sign of it, Miss Avis.

MRS. E. (*sarcastically*). Did you expect to?

PEARL. I certainly hoped to, Mrs. Edgeworth. I have never seen the book, so I do not know just what to look for. (*Goes to desk at typewriter and works.*)

MRS. E. (*cuttingly*). A lie-kly story!

Enter SAM, C.

SAM. Want a little more light on the subject, ladies? (*Turns lights on full.*)

AVIS (*leads down front*). Mrs. Edgeworth, you just must not blame Pearl for this loss. She cannot possibly have had a thing to do with it. I have been librarian here for thirty years, as you know, and have had the full responsibility and care of the books. I alone am to be blamed for this.

MRS. E. Nonsense! In all that thirty years no book was ever lost before.

AVIS. True; nor ever may be again. But however that may be, it is I alone who am to blame. It is through some carelessness of my own—

SAM (*coming down*). Now, that's all bosh!

MRS. E. Just what I say.

SAM. Listen to me, now. Ain't I here? And don't I have to dust them consarn books every day o' their tarnal lives? I handle the books a darn sight more'n either of the women folks do; and if anybody's got to make good for that pesky ellick-teeter, I reckon I'm the guy that put the sin in Cincinnati. Search me!

MRS. E. But searching isn't the *it* of it. It's the finding we want. And that, of course, can never be until *the guilty party* is forced to confession and restitution. (*Looks back at PEARL, who drops head.*) Looks guilty, every move of her.

SAM. Well, I'll be plum swallowed!

MRS. E. Have you anything more to say that pertains to the point at issue?

SAM (*bewildered*). That does what to the which?

MRS. E. If not, suppose you go and attend to your part of the work. We are quite capable of taking care of ours.

SAM (*meekly*). Yes, ma'am. (*Exits C.*)

AVIS. It's no use, Mrs. Edgeworth, to keep stirring up discordant currents of feeling. I know the book cannot be

replaced, but I will do everything in my power. I am quite willing to pay its full value and to put forth every effort to procure another copy. The matter should rest here for the present, it seems to me, in view of all the circumstances.

MRS. E. But that's not the question, Miss Hazlewood. You're talking nonsense. The question is, where *is* our copy, and who took it from the shelf? That's the one and only point I want cleared up.

Enter KATHERINE CARTER and MISS CROMPTON, L.

AVIS (*turning to meet them*). Good evening, ladies.

MISS C. And have you brought the Epictetus to light yet, Miss Hazlewood?

MRS. E. (*following AVIS up*). No, and never shall! (*AVIS goes to desk.*)

MISS C. (*walking down front, while KATHERINE sits table R.*). Oh, don't say that. Everything turns up some-time; even people. You know Judge Whitcomb has come home, I suppose. (*AVIS drops heavy book with a loud crash. Everybody jumps and looks back as she sinks into chair by desk.*)

MRS. E. (*after heavy pause*). When did he come?

MISS C. On the morning train, I believe. Some time today, anyway. (*AVIS gives stifled sob.*) Are you ill, Miss Hazlewood? (*They walk to desk.*)

AVIS (*recovering herself with firm effort*). Me? Oh, no! Quite well, thank you.

MRS. E. (*again leading down front*). By the way, Miss Crompton, what sort of work is my son doing at school this semester?

MISS C. Fairly good. As good as the average, I think. Of course, he's at the girling stage of his development—

MRS. E. That's just what I am wondering and worrying about. It's my wish that he be kept entirely away from the girl—(*slyly motions toward PEARL, raising eyebrows significantly*) you understand?

MISS C. (*glancing at PEARL with sudden enlightenment*). I see. (*Nods head slowly.*) I understand. And you wish me—

MRS. E. To keep an eye on him. Increase his work, demand more study hours, insist upon closer application—more work and less play, you know. Help me to get the best of this affair before it gets too far for interference. Why, I'd rather see him dead than tied up to a mere chit of a nobody like this one.

MISS C. She seems a very nice, well-behaved, good-natured, sweet-mannered girl, Mrs. Edgeworth. The boy might do worse.

MRS. E. A nobody—a mere nameless foundling! What are you thinking of! But—you're not his mother.

MISS C. (*hastily*). Most certainly *not*!

MRS. E. (*confidentially and mysteriously*). There's no question in my mind where that book has gone.

MISS C. (*startled*). What? You can't mean—

MRS. E. But I can—and *do*! That girl—

MISS C. But what object—

MRS. E. Don't you know how valuable the book was? It was a very rare edition, worth considerable money. She could sell it.

MISS C. But even so, a girl—(*pauses, shaking head*). What evidence is there to prove—

MRS. E. (*somewhat confused*). Oh, no evidence—as you might say. None whatever.

MISS C. Then how—

MRS. E. Why, there simply isn't anybody else that could. It *has* to be she.

MISS C. That's poor logic.

MRS. E. And she looks guilty. Whenever I look at her she blushes, and—

MISS C. But any girl would look guilty who knew herself to be under suspicion.

MRS. E. Nonsense! A guilty conscience needs no accusers.

MISS C. Anyhow, you can't convict—

MRS. E. But I can see that she loses her position—under suspicion.

MISS C. True. That, of course—but—

MRS. E. Would I not be justified—to save my son?

MISS C. (*suddenly understanding*). Ah! (*Pauses, eyeing MRS. E. curiously.*) I am not your judge, Mrs. Edgeworth.

MRS. E. But as for Burr—

MISS C. You may count on me. (*Raises voice.*) You may be sure, Mrs. Edgeworth, that I have the very best interest of all my students at heart. (*They walk up to desk.*) When you find that book, Miss Hazlewood, you may send me word by one of the students—or telephone.

AVIS. Certainly.

MRS. E. I have an appointment with Rev. Harding, Miss Hazlewood, but I'll be back before closing time.

AVIS (*listlessly*). Very well.

KATHERINE (*to MISS C. and MRS. E. as they pass her at end of table, L.*). What a dear old soul Miss Avis is, and what a sweet, sad face tonight. I can't help watching her. There's a whole drama in every line of her face.

MISS C. True; but it's always full of romance, and poetry, and dream the mirror of the soul of fire and fragrance.

KATHERINE. Oh, if I could just put that into a poem! You say it so beautifully. Good night.

MISS C. and MRS. E. Good night. (*They exeunt L.*)

Pause. PEARL typewrites. Enter POSTMAN, L.

POSTMAN. A special delivery, Miss Hazlewood. (*Gives letter, shows book.*)

AVIS. Thank you. (*Looks over delivery book.*) Sign here?

POSTMAN. If you please.

Enter SUSANNE, L. POSTMAN looks over shoulder at her.

SUSANNE. Beat me, didn't you? I've been following you for blocks.

POSTMAN. Who? Me? (*Turns in surprise to face her.*)

SUSANNE. No, not me. You! (*Laughs teasingly.*) No woman can ever move fast enough to catch you—when you don't want her to.

POSTMAN. But what if I *do* want her to?

SUSANNE. Oh, then you'll be dead easy—like all of your kind.

POSTMAN (*takes book from AVIS, starts L.*). Good night.

SUSANNE. Oh, must you go? And so soon? That's another blow. You fellows are not on duty at night, are you?

POSTMAN. No, but my wife—

SUSANNE (*teasingly*). Oh, yes. The little "birdie" all alone-y, in her cage-y. I forgot him was such a nice, good little brand-new hubby that he mustn't get loose from lovey-dovey's apron string. (*Laughs.*) Don't look at me that way. It's naughty. Better go right straight home to his wife, like a dear little honey boy.

POSTMAN. I wish you'd—

Enter CLARA NELSON and RUTH, L. POSTMAN turns to deck. SUSANNE laughs.

RUTH. Why, there's Harold. I couldn't imagine where you had gone. (*Looks suspiciously at SUSANNE, who walks down front, laughing mockingly.*)

SUSANNE. Quick music. Green light. Register jealousy.

POSTMAN. Just started for home, sweetie. Brought a special to Miss Hazlewood. Come on. Let's get out of this.

RUTH. But mother—

CLARA. Trot along, children. I was once young myself. I'm old enough now to take myself safely home when I get good and ready to go.

POSTMAN. And did her think her naughty boy was never, never, never coming home to her any more?

RUTH (*looks down pouting, plainly out of humor. He chucks her under the chin and she draws back pettishly*). I—I—I—just don't know what to think. First, you wouldn't let me read the postcards in the mail bag. Then you run off and I find you here, talking to that pretty woman. I—I just don't believe I like being married a single, solitary bit, so I don't. I believe I'll stay with mother.

POSTMAN. But, dearie, listen.

RUTH. Don't want to! Go on home—go on, I say.

(*Stamps foot.*) I came with mother and I can go home with her, too. Go on! (POSTMAN *exits L. reluctantly, looking back at her sadly. She follows to door, peeps out, listens eagerly, then runs to CLARA in tears.*) Oh, mother, he went! He really, truly went! He's just as mean as mean as mean as mean! (*Sobs on CLARA's shoulder.*)

KATHERINE. Listen a minute, ladies. (*All give attention.*) The Civics Club asked me to compose a catchy little toast to our city for the banquet tomorrow night. How will this do?

There are cities who boast more,
And towns that they toast more,
And villages near that the newspapers roast more,
With their maidens who gush more,
And their young men who blush more,
But they'll all have to rush more to rush more than Rush-
more!

AVIS. Quite suggestive.

PEARL. Great, Aunt Katherine!

CLARA. Splendid, isn't it, Ruth?

RUTH. Rather pretty.

SUSANNE. Swell dope, if you ask me. But—er—don't you think it sounds a little—fast? Quite a movie effect, you know—the rushing, rushing, rushing of the film across the screen. (*Dances up stage to illustrate.*) It would make a scrumptious scenario. (*At desk.*) Have you any of the Duchess' novels?

AVIS. No.

SUSANNE. Mary J. Holmes?

AVIS. None.

SUSANNE. Laura Jean Libby?

AVIS (*smiling*). Nothing.

SUSANNE. Elinor Glyn?

AVIS. Not a thing.

SUSANNE. Dear me! How hopelessly behind the times. You sure do need to *rush more* if you keep your town on the map. Give me something of Charles Sheldon's or

Ralph Connor's. Your preacher recommends them as good for my soul. (*Avis rises, gets two volumes and hands them to her.*) One of each, eh? Thank you. (*Walks down to table and sits left, near KATHERINE.*)

CLARA (*leaning on desk at right side*). Oh, Avis! Have you heard—

AVIS. Yes, Clara. Pearl, will you go and find the fourth volume of Gibbon's "Roman Empire"? (*PEARL exits C.*)

CLARA. I was so excited about it, I thought I'd just have to come and tell you. I didn't want him to drop in and take you altogether by surprise.

AVIS. He couldn't do that, Clara. I've been expecting him every minute of every day for the last ten years. I have heard his step in the hall, his voice outside the door, his fingers on the latch, his whistle on the air—oh, Clara! He has never been away—never out of my life!

RUTH (*leaning on left side*). I know. Just the way it was with me and Harold, till—till—(*sobs*). We'd better go, mother. Maybe he's sorry by this time.

CLARA. Yes, child, we'll go. But I just wanted to say, Avis, that I feel sure you are going to find the crowning happiness of a lifetime at last.

AVIS. But we do not *find* happiness, Clara. It is never the gift of environment or circumstance. It is a spontaneous growth from within—born of the constant thoughts of one's inner being.

RUTH (*bewildered*). But, Miss Hazlewood, if we look—oh, I don't know!

AVIS (*rises, laying hand on RUTH's shoulder and gently indicating the books*). My child, the books and I have learned, long ago, that the outer binding and surroundings do not make our lives. It is what is inside the cover that tells the story. (*Sits again as CLARA and RUTH walk to door.*)

CLARA (*at door, looking over shoulder*). If the Judge doesn't claim what's coming to him right here and now, he isn't fit to be a judge—so there!

Exeunt CLARA and RUTH. Pause. Enter HARDING and

MRS. E. *They pause just inside door and MRS. E. seems to be instructing HARDING. AVIS is busy at desk, SUSANNE reading and KATHERINE writing at table on left. PEARL off C. After a brief discussion, with many gestures on her part, and nods of assent on his, MRS. E. walks dozen front, sits at table on right, pretending to read, but watching HARDING closely and listening intently.*

HARDING (*advancing to desk and speaking somewhat reluctantly*). May I—er—speak to Miss Reynolds, please?

AVIS (*surprised*). To Miss Reynolds? Pearl?

HARDING. Yes. She is here, I suppose. She hasn't—er—run away?

AVIS (*emphatically*). Certainly not, Mr. Harding. She is here—attending to her usual duties. (*Walks C. and calls.*) Pearl, are you busy?

PEARL (*off C.*). Just looking.

AVIS. Come in a moment, please. (*AVIS resumes seat. PEARL enters C.*) Mr. Harding wishes to see you.

PEARL (*wonderingly*). To see me? (*Walks to him.*) Good evening, Mr. Harding.

HARDING. Good evening. I have heard of the—loss—of that—er—valuable book, here, Miss Reynolds, and I have felt called of the spirit to come and reason with you, to entreat you to confess and return the volume before it is everlastingly too late.

PEARL. But, Mr. Harding, I tell you I haven't—

HARDING. There! There! Don't say another word. "Thou shalt not bear false witness" is just as important a command as "Thou shalt not steal."

PEARL (*wringing hands in despair*). Oh, but I must tell the truth! I must—

HARDING (*lays hand on her shoulder, but she shakes it off*). Just what I am urging you to do, poor soul. Confess the wrong, restore the book, and be forgiven of your sins while yet there is time. Think of the trouble you are bringing upon Miss Hazlewood—

PEARL (*bewildered, turning to AVIS*). Upon her?

HARDING. Of course. Trouble you could so easily save her if you would just be honest with yourself—and us all.

PEARL. Trouble? Upon Miss Avis? I? Oh, no, no, no—not that! I'd rather die than make her a moment's trouble.

HARDING. But you are not asked to die. You are asked to confess—

PEARL. But, sir, you do not understand. I have never—

(MRS. E. *risés, walks toward them.* PEARL *is between the two at center.*)

HARDING. I beg your pardon, but I do understand, quite too well. I am grieved, shocked, amazed by your obstinacy—your hard-heartedness—your cruelty to Miss Hazlewood—and Mrs. Edgeworth says—

PEARL (*turning to MRS. E.*). So this is your fault, is it? I might have known. I did not take the book. I never even saw the book! If this was the Judgment Day and you were the Angel of Death itself, I could give no other answer. (*Retreats to seat behind screen and sits, sobbing audibly.*)

MRS. E. Brazen thing! She has no shame, you see, Mr. Harding; no moral sense at all. She is unredeemable. I am sure—

KATHERINE (*rising*). Mrs. Edgeworth, I cannot stand this. Pearl is my adopted child. She has lived with me ever since she was six years old, when I took her, motherless and fatherless, from the arms of a dying nurse. I have always found her absolutely truthful, and I would stake my very life on her honesty.

SUSANNE (*rising*). Mr. Harding, may I speak to you? My conscience is giving me a great deal of trouble.

HARDING (*with alacrity*). Certainly. (*They walk down, sit right of table R.* SUSANNE *removes coat, hanging it over chair.*)

MRS. E. You may stake your life as recklessly as you like, Katherine Carter. I am taking no such gambler's chance with mine, nor with anything belonging to me.

Enter JUDGE WHITCOMB, L. *All turn to face him.*

JUDGE. Good evening, ladies. Mrs. Edgeworth (*shaking hands*); Mrs. Carter (*shaking hands*); and—(*looks toward desk as—*)

Enter SAM, C. AVIS rises, visibly moved.

JUDGE. And here's dear old Samuel, too—as big and handsome as life!

SAM (*shaking hands*). Mighty glad to see you, Judge Whitcomb. This old burg was sure rushing straight to wreck and ruin without you.

JUDGE (*bowing very low over AVIS' hand*). And how is the Lady of the Library?

AVIS. Very well, thank you, Judge. Very busy, as you see, and very happy to welcome you home again after all these years.

JUDGE. How little you have changed, old friend. A queen among the books I left you here; a queen I find you still, whose kingdom but grows more and more secure as her crown grows brighter with the passing of sunny days.

SAM. Just what I was saying, Judge. (*AVIS sits.*)

JUDGE. I must not intrude nor interrupt your work, my library lady, but—

MRS. E. (*walking up behind him*). How well and prosperous you are looking, Judge.

JUDGE (*turns to her reluctantly*). Well, I can certainly return the compliment, Mrs. Edgeworth. You all look pretty good to me.

KATHERINE (*crosses to desk, while MRS. E. leads JUDGE to table at left. He follows with courtesy but obvious reluctance*). I must go, Miss Hazlewood. (*PEARL rises from behind screen.*) Come home as early as you can, Pearl dear. I'll be waiting up for you.

PEARL. I will, Aunt Katherine, and—thank you for all your kindness. (*KATHERINE exits L. PEARL resumes seat at typewriter.*)

MRS. E. (*standing down front by table*). And did you find your sister, Judge?

JUDGE (*leaning on chair back*). No, Mrs. Edgeworth.

My mission to France, like all the other ventures of my life, seems to have been utterly in vain. My sister and her husband had both died very suddenly, of an epidemic. He was an artist, you know—care-free, with no thought for any morrow—and their little girl—six years old, I believe—had been left to the uncertain care of a strange nurse. The young couple had been very much in love and so utterly sufficient to one another that they had few friends—no very intimate ones—so I found very little clew to work upon. Gay Bohemia in Paris keeps no strings on its devotees; so, though I spent the best part of ten years in a persistent search, I accomplished almost nothing. It is as though the earth had hungrily opened its greedy jaws and swallowed at one gulp every trace of the little one—the only one left in all the world of the boasted Whitcomb blood.

MRS. E. I am very sorry, Judge. We all hoped you would have better success. But we are glad to have you back in dear old Rushmore, and we hope the old place may still hold some charm for you.

JUDGE. Thank you. You are very kind.

MRS. E. (*turns back*). There seems nothing else I can do here just now. (*Looks at watch, walks back to desk.*) It is nearly closing time. I will go home now, Miss Hazlewood, for I must have a talk with my son (*with a sharp glance at PEARL*), but I will be here again early in the morning to resume this investigation. I shall never give up until this mystery is solved and the offender punished to the full demands of the crime. (*Exits L.*)

JUDGE (*takes newspaper from table and sits on bench behind table L., where he can watch AVIS without being seen*). Everything looks so natural. The same old books, the same old tables and chairs, almost the same flowers in the same vase, with the same sweet face behind them that has smiled through all my dreams. (*Pause. Sound of typewriter.*) That woman hoped there'd be some charm for me here. She little guesses what a magnet of fiery force this hallowed spot has ever been. It seems to me that every tendril of my life is firmly rooted here, and whenever I

pull one up, it bleeds and leaves an open wound. (*Pause. Typewriter.*) Oh, Avis! Avis! Why have you thought it necessary to make both our lives so hard to live?

SUSANNE (*looking across at him*). Muffled drums. Enter strong lead, weeping. Blue lights, turned low. Sound of rain outside. (*Turns to HARDING.*) If you'll help me on with my coat, Mr. Harding. It is getting late, and time good little girls were dreaming of the angels. "I'm afraid to go home in the dark."

HARDING (*rising, taking coat from chair and helping her awkwardly*). It is not safe for a pretty girl like you. I think I'd better go with you—just to protect you, you know. (*Exit HARDING and SUSANNE, L.*)

Enter SAM, C., watching.

SAM. Well, I'll just be—swallowed! (*Exits C. in disgust.*)

Pause. PEARL typewrites. Enter BURR, cautiously looks around.

BURR. Is mother here?

AVIS. No.

BURR. Sure?

AVIS. Perfectly sure. She went home several minutes ago.

PEARL (*taking sheet from typewriter and rising*). And I was just going. (*Starts C. for wraps.*)

BURR. One minute, Pearl.

PEARL (*motioning him away*). Wait. (*Exits C.*)

BURR. Oh, Miss Hazlewood, I don't know what to do, nor how to do it.

AVIS. Don't be unhappy about it, Burr. It will all come right someday.

BURR. Do you think so?

AVIS. I know it. When we do the very best we know, at all times, and trust the bit of God in us to reveal the best when we do not know, things have to work around to make all our dreams come true.

BURR. God bless you, Miss Hazlewood. You're the best friend a fellow ever had.

Re-enter PEARL, with wraps on.

PEARL. What is it, Burr, you wished to say to me?

BURR. I only wish to make you feel sure, Pearl, that I am not one bit to blame for anything that mother says and does. I cannot understand the attitude she is taking; but please believe that I am in no way implicated in anything that has taken place. (*Leads her down front.*) You believe me, don't you?

PEARL. Why, certainly, Burr. I knew you—

BURR. And I want to say, too, that I love you; that I have always loved you; that I always will love you, and that some day, whether you want to or not, you're going to marry me—if only to save my life. There's never been but one girl in all the world for me—and you are that one. You believe me, don't you?

PEARL. I have to, Burr, when you say it that way, but—

BURR. And don't you care for me a little?

PEARL. I would if—

BURR. If—?

PEARL. If I dared, Burr. (*Avis walks down to them.*)

BURR (*putting arm about her*). Dared? What's to hinder? (*Looks over shoulder at Avis.*) Don't take her away from me, Miss Hazlewood.

AVIS. I certainly won't. There have been too many young loving hearts broken by interfering friends, my boy, however well meaning, for me to add even one to the number. I shall, on the contrary, do all I can to help you both in the clearing up of this tangle. I do not wish to interfere in the slightest degree with your mother's authority, Burr; for of course it is only love for you that prompts her action, and she thinks she is doing the right and motherly thing; but it's a cruel and wicked thing to tear asunder two hearts that truly cling together in the only thing on earth that makes life really worth the living, and—

JUDGE (*has risen and gradually approached the group,*

unseen by any of them). Avis—Avis—do you mean what you have just said? Can it be possible that, after all these wasted years, you are beginning to realize what life—

Enter ALMIRA HAZLEWOOD, L.

ALMIRA (*commandingly*). Avis! (*AVIS jumps and turns back.*) Come! (*AVIS starts toward her slowly. JUDGE follows to C. AVIS exits C. for wraps. ALMIRA stands in doorway C., barring the passage.*) Don't come any nearer, sir! (*Pause. They eye each other steadily.*)

PEARL (*holds out hands to BURR, speaks tearfully*). Take me home, Burr. (*He puts his arm around her and leads her out L.*)

JUDGE *finally turns away and walks to front of desk. AVIS enters C. with wraps on and ALMIRA hurries her out L., AVIS giving a last glance over shoulder to JUDGE.*

(*JUDGE walks up behind desk, fingers her pencils, cards, etc., picks up small lace handkerchief and presses it against cheek, sinking to chair and leaning on desk, with a sob.*)

Enter SAM, C.

SAM (*after a pause, watching JUDGE pityingly*). Lights out, Judge! (*Turns out light save the desk light, leaving only the JUDGE'S head and face in view. Spotlight effect.*)

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT III.

Scene same as Acts I and II. Time, next evening. AVIS is discovered standing behind desk, looking at books R. SAM is on his knees, picking up scraps of paper in front of dictionary. After curtain is well up, there is a slight pause, broken by a cough from SAM.

AVIS (*stirring slightly at the sound*). Are you catching cold, Sam?

SAM. No—papers.

AVIS (*sighs and turns to desk, sitting wearily*). If we could only find that book, it would be the best day's work

ever done in this library. It seems to me I've looked everywhere—but of course I haven't.

SAM. No; for when you look the *right* where, you'll find the book will be *right* there (*chanted in sing-song fashion, accenting the "right."*)

AVIS. Oh, Sam! Sam! Whoever thought it of you?

SAM (*rising apologetically*). It's in the air, Miss Avis. A fellow can't keep company with all these fellows steady and not get a little of it in his blood. But look here, now. Don't you worry a bit more about that book. The Lord knows you hain't got it in your pocket, and He knows Miss Pearl hain't, and I hain't; but He knows it's got to come to light, too, don't He? So it stands to reason He'll attend to it, don't it?

AVIS. It should, Sam—if we knew how to trust His Providence more utterly. We haven't faith enough in the ought-to-be's, I'm afraid. But so many things have gone topsy-turvy lately it's hard to keep one's head in the right place sometimes.

Enter HARDING, L. Exit SAM with waste basket, C.

AVIS. Good evening, Mr. Harding.

HARDING. Good evening, Miss Hazlewood. Is Miss Reynolds here?

AVIS. No. She has worked very hard today and isn't at all well. I told her she needn't hurry back after supper. Did you wish to see her?

HARDING. Yes. I do wish the poor, misguided girl would confess her sin. It would be so much easier for her in the long run if she would just own up and—

AVIS (*rising*). Mr. Harding, she is not guilty of anything to confess. Can't you—won't you—understand that the child has no more to do with the loss of that book than I have—or you!

HARDING. *I*, Miss Hazlewood—*I*? You don't mean *me*, surely? Why, how could—

AVIS. Exactly. And how could she? She has never seen the volume.

HARDING. Are you sure?

AVIS. Absolutely.

HARDING. Then who is guilty?

AVIS. What reason have we to think that anybody is?

HARDING. Where is the book, then?

AVIS. That is the mystery, Mr. Harding, and the only one.

HARDING. But what do you know of this child—her parentage and all that? She's a veritable "child of the people," is she not?

AVIS. I do not need to know more than I do, Mr. Harding, to feel sure she comes from refined, cultured ancestry. (*Sits.*) As for her story, it is soon told. Mrs. Carter brought her with her when she returned from Europe ten years ago.

Enter KATHERINE, L.

AVIS. Here is Mrs. Carter now. Perhaps she can tell you more. Mr. Harding is interested in Pearl's history, Mrs. Carter.

KATHERINE. Very kind of Mr. Harding, I'm sure; but there isn't much to be said. A nurse was bringing her to America to find her relatives. Cholera broke out aboard ship. The nurse died but the child lived. The nurse was stricken suddenly and was unable to say anything about the child, and of course the authorities destroyed any personal belongings that might have held a clew. I was then mourning the loss of my own little one and gladly took this wee thing into my care. The only thing about her that could help in any way in identifying her was a pearl ring of curious design suspended about her neck, because it was too large for her baby finger. She is wearing it now, though I have long given up all hope of finding her relatives, if any are living, who might be in any way connected with her.

Enter SUSANNE, L.

HARDING. I see. It's a peculiar case.

KATHERINE. Unusual, perhaps. I don't know that it can be termed peculiar.

SUSANNE (*at desk*). Have you any Bible stories, Miss Hazlewood? (KATHERINE *smiles and walks down to table R., sits at left side.*)

AVIS. I believe we have a few collections, Miss—er—Mrs.—

SUSANNE. Better say “Mrs. Miller.” That’ll be nearer the legal thing here.

HARDING. I know where they are, Mrs. Miller. I will show them to you, if I may. (*She takes his arm. They exit C.*)

Enter MRS. EDGEWORTH, L.

MRS. E. (*looking all around, behind screen, etc., before speaking*). Isn’t your assistant in?

AVIS. Not yet.

MRS. E. (*significantly*). Do you think she will be?

AVIS. Certainly.

MRS. E. It wouldn’t be wise for her to attempt to leave town. Has she returned the book? (*Stands right side of desk.*)

AVIS. Mrs. Edgeworth, Pearl has never had any book to return.

MRS. E. Nonsense, Miss Hazlewood. I am surprised. I thought you were too conscientious to shield any offender from the consequences of a downright crime.

AVIS (*rising*). Mrs. Edgeworth!

Re-enter HARDING and SUSANNE, C. Take positions L. •

MRS. E. As President of the Library Board I insist upon the immediate return of that book or the dismissal of Miss Reynolds from the service. Do you understand? (KATHERINE *rises, walks up right.*)

Enter SAM, stands C. entrance, listening.

AVIS. I do understand, Mrs. Edgeworth, and as the librarian of this library, who has been its loyal servant and devoted lover of every book for thirty years this June, I here and now resign my position and declare the post vacant from this moment.

ALL (*in consternation*). What?

(*Picture: HARDING and SUSANNE, left; MRS. E. and KATHERINE, R.; AVIS and SAM, C.*)

AVIS (*with firm dignity*). I mean it every word. (*Walks L.*)

MRS. E. (*astounded*). But Rachel and Almira—

AVIS. Have nothing whatever to say in the matter. (*Turns, walks down front.*)

SUSANNE. Rattle of drums, clash of cymbals. Enter villainess. Fall, fair heroine. Quick curtain. Let's go back to the Bible stories. (*Exit SUSANNE and HARDING, C., followed by SAM.*)

KATHERINE (*intercepting AVIS at center-front, while MRS. E. sits desk*). Miss Hazlewood, I certainly thank you for your kindness to my poor child.

AVIS (*shaking hands*). Not kindness, Mrs. Carter, but common justice. (*KATHERINE goes to bench L. and sits.*) I will wait here until she comes. (*Turns to books, R.*) Good-bye, dear old friends. I have loved you long and faithfully, and I believe you understand me. (*Draws hand along them caressingly.*) You know I am not deserting you, for my heart will return to linger here with you as long as it has any strength or emotion to throb with life at all. (*Pause. Sits table R., facing front.*)

• *Re-enter HARDING and SUSANNE with books. Sit table L. Enter JUDGE WHITCOMB, L.*

JUDGE (*startled*). Mrs. Edgeworth, you here? Where is—(*looks down, sees AVIS and walks down toward her with puzzled air.*) Ah! I see. (*Pauses behind AVIS' chair.*) Avis, it is a stupendous thought that—

HARDING (*who has risen and come to meet him*). Good evening, sir. Are you Judge Whitcomb?

JUDGE (*shaking hands with wondering air*). I am, sir. But I do not seem to remember you.

HARDING. Of course not. (*Leads down to left table.*) Let's sit down. (*They sit right side of L. table.*) I'm a new

man, you see. The new minister here, in fact. My name's Harding.

JUDGE (*courteously*). Glad to know you

HARDING. Queer case—this book mix-up, eh?

JUDGE. I haven't heard of any.

HARDING. What? Why, the girl—the foundling— orphan waif, you know—the little girl with the pearl ring—

JUDGE (*springing to feet*). The little girl with the pearl ring? Explain yourself! What little girl, and what ring? Don't trifle with me, sir. My sister had a pearl ring—a peculiar setting—and the little girl wore it round her neck when the nurse—

KATHERINE (*springing to feet, across table from him*). What, sir? Do you mean that? Are you sure?

JUDGE. Absolutely.

KATHERINE. Oh, Judge! My little girl—Pearl Reynolds—

JUDGE. Reynolds? That's the name—tell me where—

Enter PEARL, L.

KATHERINE. Here! Come here, Pearl! (PEARL *walks down to them*.) Show the Judge your ring. (MRS. E. *follows her down, listening eagerly*.)

JUDGE (*takes PEARL'S hand and examines the ring very closely, then turns her face to the light and scans her closely*.) It is she—my sister Ada's very face, and—yes, the ring! In it is engraved the words, "*N'oubliez*"—which means, of course, "Do not forget."

PEARL. Yes, yes! And who are you?

JUDGE. Your uncle, little girl, who has been searching for you for ten long years. I watched you last night and wondered why your face and form were so familiar, and why your voice had such a subtle power to stir my memory. I did not dream—(*holds out arms to her and she goes to him*).

PEARL. Then I am not an outcast—a foundling—a nobody—a—

JUDGE. Don't, my child. You are my only sister's girl—

and to think that while I was searching the world for you, here you were, safe and sound, in my own home town! Mrs. Carter, how can I ever thank you?

KATHERINE (*shaking hands*). By not trying, Judge. She has been a constant joy to me. (*Telephone rings, MRS. E. looks at AVIS. AVIS pays no attention. All look at first one, then the other. Bell rings again. AVIS looks at MRS. E. MRS. E. motions to her, but she shakes her head emphatically and returns to a magazine. PEARL goes and sits by her and they talk in dumb show. JUDGE stands behind PEARL. MRS. E. reluctantly goes to telephone after it rings the third time. The others resume seats.*)

MRS. E. (*at 'phone*). Hello! . . . Yes, this is the library. . . . No, it's Mrs. Edgeworth talking. . . . No, Miss Crompton, we haven't found it yet, but I am sure we will come across it before long. . . . Oh, no! Of course the dear child was not at all to blame. . . . So kind of you to say so, but of course nobody could have thought she knew anything about it. . . . Good-bye.

JUDGE. What is this I hear about some book? What book is it, and what is wrong? (*All look from one to the other, each waiting for the other to speak.*)

MRS. E. A book was lost from the shelves, Judge—a very rare volume—"The Philosophy of Epictetus"—

JUDGE. That book? Why, I gave it to the library myself, and I was reading it the very last night I was here, ten years ago. I remember it as though it were yesterday. I was dreaming of—well, no matter what—and absent-mindedly carried it home with me.

Enter BURR, L. Walks down to group.

JUDGE. I was about to walk back to the library to return it to its place, when I received the cable that my sister was dying in Paris, and I knew I must leave Rushmore on the midnight train in order to catch a steamer in New York. I wrote a long letter to—well, no matter whom, but it was of most vital importance to me—and slipped it inside the

book, sending it by a small boy to the library. Let me see, who could that youngster have been?

BURR (*coming forward*). I am the guilty one, sir.

MRS. E. (*horrified*). Burr? You! (*All rise with interest.*)

BURR. Yes, sir—I. If you'll remember, sir, you told me to be sure and give it to Miss Avis, and let nobody else see me. Well, sir, Miss Avis wasn't here, but her big sister was, and I didn't dare give it to her, of course, so I hid it.

ALL. Where?

BURR. I don't remember where, sir. I was just a little shaver—only ten, you know—and you didn't say there was a letter in it.

JUDGE (*softly*). That was my secret.

MRS. E. I am astounded, Burr. You—my son—responsible for all this trouble! Why didn't you tell us when we first discovered the loss of the book?

BURR. Heavens and earth! It never once dawned on me that that book was the one that was raising such a hubbub. I had completely forgotten the blamed thing, and—and—(*glancing slyly at PEARL*) I was thinking about something else.

JUDGE. Could you have put it—

BURR. Wait—I seem to catch a glimmer of an idea! I believe I can find it. (*Exit BURR, C. All but JUDGE and AVIS sit. They walk front.*)

JUDGE. And you never got my letter, Avis?

AVIS. I have had no word from you for ten years, Oliver.

JUDGE. And that is why you didn't answer?

AVIS. Of course. What was there for me to answer?

JUDGE. What a fool I've been. Come. We must find that book. (*Starts up stage with her. MRS. E. stops him at C.*)

MRS. E. Just a minute, Judge. I want to ask your consent to your niece's marriage to my son.

JUDGE. What? So soon? I shall be very, very particular who wins Pearl's heart and hand, Mrs. Edgeworth. The Whitcomb's have never made unworthy alliances. (*He*

stands behind PEARL'S chair, hand on her shoulder. AVIS sits by her. MRS. E. stands by JUDGE. The others have their former seats.)

MRS. E. But they have been in love with each other for a long time, and I have always hoped the dear girl would take pity on him. She is such a sweet, winsome child. *(To PEARL, who winces and shrinks from her).* You won't say "No" to my poor Burr, will you, dear child? *(PEARL rises, faces MRS. E.)*

PEARL. I do not know what I may find it in my heart to say to Burr. I have nothing whatever to say to his mother. *(AVIS rises and walks with PEARL to bench. PEARL sits. AVIS turns and crosses to books at R., fingering them tenderly.)*

Enter POSTMAN and RUTH. MRS. E. meets them.

RUTH. We want a real good novel, if you please—something about honeymoons and newly-weds, and all that. We've just made up, you see, and—

POSTMAN. Nonsense, honey, we didn't quarrel. *(MRS. E. hands book.)*

RUTH. We came awful close. 'Tain't nice to quarrel; but—

POSTMAN. We do love the making-up, don't we? *(They exeunt L. As they are leaving RUTH sees SUSANNE and makes up face at her. SUSANNE laughs loud.)*

SUSANNE. Exit wicked temptress. Enter lovey-dovey. Spoons clash. Lights low.

Enter BURR, C., dusting book.

BURR. Here's the book, sir.

JUDGE. Dear old Epictetus! Where did you find it?

BURR. Down in the basement, in a niche between two stones. I knew it would keep dry there and nobody could ever find it. *(Crosses and sits by PEARL.)*

SUSANNE. Fancy a town where a book could be lost for ten years having the nerve to call itself Rushmore!

JUDGE *(reads)*. "True education lies in learning to wish things to be as they actually are; it lies in learning to dis-

tinguish what is our own from what does not belong to us." That's the very sentence I was pondering over at this very table ten years ago. And here is the letter.

AVIS (*crossing to him, holding out hand*). My letter, if you please, Oliver.

JUDGE (*handing it to her*). Yes, Avis, and may it speak to your heart now all that I hoped it would whisper then. (*Reads.*) "But there is only one thing which is fully our own; that is, our will or purpose. God has given us a will which cannot be restrained, compelled or thwarted; He has put it wholly in our own power, so that even He Himself has no power to check or control it. Nothing external, neither death nor exile, nor pain, nor any such thing, is ever the cause of our acting or not acting; the sole true cause lies in our opinions and judgments."

BURR (*leading PEARL to him*). Judge Whitcomb, I restored to you the letter—your chance of happiness. Will you give me mine?

JUDGE (*putting hand under her chin to raise her face*). Is it your wish, little girl?

PEARL. It *was*, Judge.

JUDGE. "Uncle Oliver," if you please, my dear.

PEARL. Yes, Uncle Oliver. I'll soon get used to really, truly belonging to somebody.

JUDGE. Of course you will. And you want to belong to—

PEARL. You mean Burr?

JUDGE. Yes, this presumptuous youngster who asks me for my pearl, as soon as I've found it—after ten years looking, too. Nervy, I call it.

PEARL. Burr's the very best boy in all the world, Uncle, and I think it would be just heaven on earth to belong to him; but his mother—(*looks around, to be sure MRS. E. is at desk*) I just can't marry his mother."

JUDGE. Never mind his mother. (*Turns to BURR.*) Will you act the man to her, boy?

BURR. I will—God helping me, Judge!

JUDGE. Then (*places PEARL's hand in BURR's*). Make her happy.

BURR. Thank you, sir. Come, Pearl. (*Leads her back. Pauses at desk.*) Mother, we will try to forgive you, but you nearly killed us both. If she hadn't loved me even more than she feared you, we might have served our sixty years, too.

PEARL (*softly*). "Perfect love casteth out fear." (*They exeunt L.*)

MRS. E. (*starts L. as KATHERINE walks back. They meet near door*). I must go with them. I have always longed for a daughter. (*Takes KATHERINE's arm.*) Come, Mrs. Carter. Take me home with you. (*SUSANNE and HARDING rise, walk up stage.*)

SUSANNE. Dear me! I do seem to need so much religious instruction. I'm afraid I won't make a very good minister's wife. I'm not so very crazy about Ladies' Aid, Missionary Societies, and all that. But if you really think you can convert me, I'll think it over—and—

HARDING. You'll give up the movies?

SUSANNE. Well, maybe. And when I get my divorce all safe and sound for this State, I'll—

HARDING. Divorce! Divorce! (*Staggers back with both hands up in horror, as if to ward her off. She advances, laughing teasingly. He backs to C. and staggers backward into the arms of SAM, who enters C. just in time.*)

SAM. Well, I'll be everlastingly coughed up and spit out!

HARDING. Thank you, sir. Thank you. I—I—go away, lady—please go away!

SUSANNE. Anything to oblige. (*Dances off L., kissing her hand to him.*)

HARDING (*shaking SAM's hand*). Oh, what a rescue, sir! What a rescue! Can you assist me out the door, sir? I—I fear my heart is weak! (*Exeunt HARDING and SAM, left, SAM supporting HARDING.*)

JUDGE (*walks and stands behind AVIS' chair, left front, where she has been reading and re-reading letter ever since he gave it to her.*) Have you read the letter, Avis?

AVIS. Yes.

JUDGE. And what's the answer? (*Pause. She looks down.*) Surely you cannot call it sudden. I've waited ten years for an answer to that letter, Avis.

AVIS. And I've waited ten years for the letter, Oliver. I wanted it—ah, how I wanted it—that night, ten years ago! I was expecting it—ready for it—hoping for it—but it never, never came!

OLIVER. But you have always known—always! And tonight the barriers are all torn down.

AVIS (*rising*). But, Oliver, consider our age.

JUDGE. That's just exactly what I am considering, Avis. We've no time to waste. Sit down, sweetheart—here. (*Pulls out chair and seats her in it at foot of table R., seating himself just across from her.*)

While these changes are being made, SAM re-enters, L., sees the situation, smiles and exits C., whistling "Silver Threads Among the Gold," or some other appropriate old melody.

JUDGE. When you were ten you made mud pies for me in the playhouse I built, and you vowed every single day, and many times a day, that you'd be my little wife for ever and ever, amen! Do you remember, dear?

AVIS. Yes.

JUDGE. When you were twenty, you wanted to go to college before we settled down to married monotony, and I couldn't refuse you anything. My arms were aching for you, but I consented.

AVIS. Yes, you were so good about it, Oliver.

JUDGE. Then, before we knew it, you were thirty. Your mother had lost her property and needed your support. You were too proud and independent to let me supply the help I craved to give you. Oh, Avis, did you guess how it made me suffer when that joy was denied me and you came in here to work your days away?

AVIS. I felt it, Oliver, but it seemed my duty—then.

JUDGE. Maybe so. Anyway, it was your decree, and I submitted. And so time went on. The time came when

your years numbered forty, and the bright locks were threaded with silver. The little mother was gone; but Rachel and Almira seemed to have more influence with you than I did—or else you thought they needed you more. Anyway, ten long years of waiting was added to my sentence.

AVIS. Do you think it was easy for me, Oliver?

JUDGE. You did not suffer as I did, sweetheart, for I was all alone then. Ten years ago you were fifty—just as fair and beautiful as at twenty—at least to me. Financial affairs had adjusted themselves; the old investment had begun to render up its dividends, and so far as I could see there was nothing left to separate us. But my letter remained unanswered—even unnoticed—and until tonight I did not dream that you had not received it. (*Reaches across table and takes her hand in his.*) Now, what is it to be? I have considered our age, dear, and I am not willing to serve another ten years. I want you, too, to consider it. (*Pause.*)

AVIS (*rising*). But Rachel and Almira.

JUDGE (*springing up, impatiently*). Hang Rachel and Almira!

AVIS (*goes to him and lays finger on his lip*). I haven't heard you use that word for forty years.

JUDGE (*takes her hand from his lips and holds it against cheek*). I haven't had sufficient provocation. It's the Judge's right to pass sentence of execution in extreme cases.

AVIS. But think how they need me.

JUDGE. How about my need? (*Pauses. She looks down.*) Where does your heart lead? Come, let us go and get a license, look up that new minister and just—go back to playing house.

Enter RACHEL and ALMIRA, L.

AVIS (*drawing away*). Oh, I couldn't—I daren't! Rachel and Almira would never give their consent.

JUDGE. Nonsense. When will you come of age. It seems to me—

RACHEL (*shocked*). Avis!

AVIS (*turning in fright*). Yes, Rachel.

ALMIRA. It's closing time. Are you ready?

AVIS (*looks from her to JUDGE and back again*). I—I—yes—no—I don't think so, Almira.

JUDGE. The fact is, Miss Hazlewood, and Miss Rachel, I have just asked Avis—for the sixth or seventh time, I believe—to be my wife.

ALMIRA. What? You dared—without asking me first?

RACHEL. Or me!

JUDGE. But I didn't want you—nor you! (*Speaking to each in turn.*) I wanted Avis!

ALMIRA. Thank goodness, Avis has been too well brought up to listen to you.

RACHEL. Get your wraps, Avis, and—

AVIS (*with sudden decision*). No, Rachel, I'm not going.

ALMIRA. What?

RACHEL. Why?

AVIS (*laying hand on JUDGE's arm*). Oliver wants me.

RACHEL. What of that?

ALMIRA. Are you crazy?

AVIS. I guess so. Anyway, I don't care! I don't care! I want Oliver.

RACHEL and ALMIRA (*together*). Why, Avis Hazlewood! (*They start to separate the JUDGE and AVIS.*)

Enter SAM, C.

SAM (*catching each by the arm just before they reach the two*). Don't interrupt, ladies. That strikes me as a private conversation—a case of “two's company”—four ain't! It's time for you and me to step out of the way and give them young folks a chance.

RACHEL and ALMIRA (*struggling to escape as he draws them back*). Sir! Stop!

SAM. Come quietly, ladies. Step softly. 'Tain't our butt-in. It's Judge Whitcomb's turn now. (*He draas them out C.*)

JUDGE (*holds out arms*). Avis!

AVIS. Yes, Oliver. (*In his arms.*) Is it too late to find the minister?

SAM (*at C.*). Lights out, Judge! (*Turns out lights, throwing spotlight on the two, their faces together.*)

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